

# Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation

## An Overview

*Conserve, protect, enhance and advocate wise use of the commonwealth's unique natural, historical, recreational, scenic and cultural resources.*

Ultimately, our citizens' livelihood, quality of life and future depend on how intelligently we manage our natural resources. That is why the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) works to give individuals, businesses, communities and all levels of government the tools and information needed to make wise decisions in conserving our natural and recreational resources. We do this through planning, funding, education and, in some cases, regulation.

In a broad sense, DCR's work falls into four categories. First, the agency protects and provides access to the various landscapes that make up the commonwealth through its management of state parks and natural area preserves. More than 7 million visitors a year enjoy breathtaking beauty and modern facilities in Virginia's award winning state parks. Natural area preserves protect significant natural resources and provide opportunities for hiking and nature observation.

### **Parks are models of conservation**

Most people know state parks are great places to enjoy the outdoors, but the parks, along with natural area preserves, also serve as models of good conservation. They also serve as centers for environmental education – places where children and grown-ups alike learn more about the importance of our natural resources in our daily lives.

Closely tied to land management, DCR identifies, inventories and protects rare plants, animals and

communities. Virginia is an ecological crossroads, rich in plant and animal species found few other places in the world. DCR's natural heritage database of these resources is recognized as the best in the state and one of the best in the Western Hemisphere.

### **Fighting nonpoint source pollution**

DCR also protects and manages water and soil resources on a watershed-by-watershed basis across the commonwealth. Staff does so in programs for runoff pollution control, flood protection and so on. DCR is the state's lead nonpoint source pollution prevention agency, and it uses financial incentives to farmers, nutrient management training and watershed-based planning to address the issue. The agency also helps the state's 47 soil and water conservation districts protect Virginia's waterways. These are voluntary programs providing clients with tools and information needed to make their own best decisions. Even where DCR has regulatory power – dam safety, stormwater management, and erosion and sediment control – staff stresses training and technical assistance as well as compliance.

And DCR provides many public and private interests with grants, financial incentives, planning, training, and technical expertise in a variety of areas involving open space protection, land use and outdoor recreation. These areas include scenic rivers, scenic byways, greenways, park design, programs for local parks and recreation professionals and more. DCR is responsible for creating and updating the state's comprehensive outdoor recreation and open space planning document, the *Virginia Outdoors Plan*.

The agency also supports various semi-public entities including the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, the Land Conservation Foundation, the Cave Board and several standing citizen boards.

## DCR by the numbers

### **Land management**

- 34 state parks
- 40 natural areas and preserves
- 3 associated properties
- Total of about 99,000 acres
- 260 miles of trails
- 164 cabins (located at Hungry Mother, Chippokes Plantation, Claytor Lake, Douthat, Fairy Stone, Twin Lakes, First Landing, Smith Mountain Lake, Staunton River, Westmoreland)
- 1,400 campsites in 18 different parks

### **State park attendance**

- 6,296,108 (2003)
- 7,008,004 (2002)
- 7,017,052 (2001)
- 6,319,300 (2000)
- 5,885,910 (1999)
- 5,491,269 (1998)

### **8 DCR Watershed Offices**

- Shenandoah (Staunton)
- Potomac (Warrenton)
- York and Rappahannock (Tappahannock)
- James (Henrico)
- Chowan and Albemarle (Suffolk)
- Roanoke (Chase City)
- New River (Dublin)
- Tennessee and Big Sandy (Abingdon)

### **DCR administers:**

- The Virginia Dam Safety Act with jurisdiction over 521 dams statewide
- 19 Scenic River segments statewide
- The Virginia Cost Share Program accounting for conservation practices on 196,000 acres of farmland in 2001
- The Virginia Recreational Trail Grants with 22 approved grants in 2003
- Water Quality Improvement Act Nonpoint Source Funds totaling more than \$48 million since its inception in 1997
- The Virginia Adopt-A-Stream Program with 373 groups having adopted 631 miles of rivers
- The Land Conservation Office and comprehensive Conservation Lands database



Department of Conservation & Recreation  
CONSERVING VIRGINIA'S NATURAL & RECREATIONAL RESOURCES

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